A REVIEW OF THE STATE OF THE BRITISH NATION.

Saturday, August 16. 1707.

I Have had two Post Letters already, and am afraid I shall have more, if I do not answer quickly, concerning a right strange and wonderful shower of Flyes, lately falling in the streets of *London*, to the surprize of the good People of the City; one of my Letters is as follows:

Mr. REVIEW,

THE most Remarkable thing has happen'd just now, as ever was known in my Memory—It is now about 7 a Clock in the Evening—for this half hour it has Rain'd Flyes all over London, *in a most prodigious manner; the streets are all cover'd with them, Peoples Hats and Cloaks are all full of them; they are small Flyes, about half the bigness of the ordinary sort, with thin Wings—When they light, they don't offer to fye again, tho' their Wings are large, but crawl upon the Ground.——*

This Account of them is very true, 'tis now a Minute since I have been staring at the shower, and 'tis not over yet; the whole City is in a surprize and admiration, and the old Women begin to predict, &c.

I am not at all for lessening the Speculations of the People, and above all, I would not displease the old Women— Prodigies and Supernatural Appearances have oftentimes carried the evident Circumstances with them, of their being Signal, Predicting and warning; and without doubt, the fourth Judgment of GOD, upon *Pharoah* King of *Egypt*, had something in it Supernatural in its Manner, tho' great and sufficiently Rational Accounts may be given, of an Intermediate Cause also.

On the other hand, I am not for filling our Heads with whymsical Notions, nor alarming the People with our side Terrors, which seldom have any other Effect, than just as the Flyes had upon the King of *Egypt*,

to

to frighten him over Night, and leave him harder the next Morning.

A ſhower of Flyes! ſays one, ay, that is to ſignify that we ſhould flye before our Enemies; I hope the QUEEN will ſend word to the Duke of *Marlborough*, not to fight the *French*, for if we do, it will be certain we ſhall be beaten and forc'd to flye; *no, no*, ſays another, you're juſt wrong; this ſhower of Flyes is to ſignify Victory, that we ſhall flye into *France*, and lighting on their great and Capital City, ſhall fall upon it and cover it all over, juſt as the Flyes did the City of *London*.

Thank you for nothing, *ſays a third*, I don't like your Prediction at all, for then we muſt cover *Paris* with our dead Bodies, and be deſtroy'd in the ſtreets, for ſo was it with the Flyes here.

O ſays another old Women in the North, this is but one of the ten Plagues GOD is ſending upon you, for your forcing the good People of *Scotland* into your Power; and till you let them go again, you will be thus plagu'd——You have had Rivers of Blood already, and now the Flyes are a coming, and ſo you will go on—Pray diſſolve this wicked Bargain, and let the People go.

And whether wou'd you go now, ſaid one of her Neighbours, you would but go into the Red Sea, and I doubt you have never a *Moſes* to part the Waves for you—Come, come, good Wife, ſays her honeſt Neighbour, we have been often enough in the *Red Sea*, we have ſeldom been without a Sea of Blood when the two Nations have differ'd—We have had a *Red Sea* always on one ſide, and a Wilderneſs on the other, for my part I am for no more of it—And as to the Flyes I am apt to think, 'tis a ſign all the *Jacobites* and Enemies to the Succeſſion will flye away and be gone like a ſhower, and fare them well, if they do not flye away, we ſhall have all our good times fly away.

Again, we find a lively Debate in the City, whether theſe Inſects were *High-Flyers*, or *Low Flyers*, ſome ſaid one, ſome the other; at laſt one ſolv'd it to general Satisfaction, and ſaid they were *High Flyers* become *Low Flyers*, and predicted from thence, the general fall of all ſorts of *High-Flying*, that they would fall as a ſhower from the Air, and being deprived of all their volant Capacities, crawl in the Dirt and Dunghills of the ſtreets; *AMEN*, ſaid all the People with a ſhout, and a general Satisfaction appear'd in every one's Face at the Prediction; for really *High-Flying* and all its Concomitants, has been but like a Storm at Sea, an Accident to Nature, and as when ever the fury of the Wind withdraws, the Sea returns to its natural Calm and Smoothneſs; ſo, after all the Diſturbance theſe *High-Flyers as they call them* have made in the World, if they would but let us alone a while, all things would return to their native Calm, and the World would keep Holiday again.

Well, well, ſaid a good honeſt body, ſtill, for all your jeſting, theſe are odd things, and theſe Flyes are but a kind of Vermine among us, that muſt ſignifie ſomething; if it be only that they diſturb the Peoples Minds they ought to be conſider'd—The more like *High-flyers* ſtill, ſaid the other, for they like Vermine do continually diſorder the Age, grow nauſeous and diſturb the People, and what muſt be done with them?—Truly, if I may give my Opinion *let them alone*, and ſay nothing to them, and they will like the Flyes in this ſhower fall down, faint in their flight, and fall in the Dirt; they will ſcare the Children, and make a talk a while, but 'tis over and gone, and there's an End of them, they deſerve no more Notice.

Well, but to what Publick Matter ſhall we liken this flying ſhowre now? And how ſhall we do to beat it out of the Heads of our People, that it it is not a Judgment from Heaven, ſent to warn the Age of worſe things a coming?

As to the looking on it as a Repreſentation of Publick Matters, I am for making as many good Compariſons as you pleaſe ——— And will by no means hinder any Body that thinks ſeriouſly upon it——— But if you will have me tell you what it ſignifies to the World at this time, I muſt confeſs, my Opinion is very ſhort, juſt nothing at all, nor is there any thing at all Supernatural in it, nor any more than I have known more than once in other Places.

In order therefore to let you ſee that this is not ſo extraordinary, I ſhall give you my thoughts on it: There are in *England*, and I ſuppoſe in other Countries too, a very great quantity of Creatures call'd *ANTS* or *Piſmires*,

Piſmires, theſe make their Neſts in the Earth, raiſe little Hills on the Surface, which ſome call *Ant* Hills, other *Piſſum* Banks, as the ſeveral Dialects of the Country direct.

Theſe Creatures lay Eggs and encreaſe abundantly, ſhould the innumerable crowds of them remain from Year to Year, they would be an *Egyptian* Plague of themſelves, but at a certain growth they are furniſh'd with Wings juſt as if it were a Direction to them to change their Habitation.

Being thus Equipp'd with Wings, and not very well practis'd in the uſe of them, they obſerve however Natures call, and at their Seaſon away they flye, like the Bees in a ſwarm, but not at all directed like them in their flight, but ſeeking new Habitations, and their Multitude being unaccountably great, they grow weary, and preſſing one another down by their own weight, when they begin to tire they fall like a ſhower.

I once knew a flight of theſe *Ants* come over the Marſhes in *Eſſex*, in a moſt prodigious quantity, black like a Cloud; they began to fall about a Mile before they came to the *Thames*, and in flying over the *Thames* they fell ſo thick, that the Water was cover'd with them; I had two Servants rowing a ſmall Boat over the River juſt at that time, and I believe near two Pecks of them fell into the Boat; they fell ſo thick, that I believe my Hatful came down the Funnel of two Chymnies in my Houſe, which ſtood near the Rivers edge; and in proportion to this quantity, they fell for the Space as I could obſerve, of a half a Mile in breadth at leaſt, *ſome Workmen I employ'd then, ſaid they ſpread two Mile*, but then they fell not ſo thick—And they continued falling for near three Miles.

Any Body will imagine, the quantity muſt be prodigious that muſt thus come together; but if again they will obſerve the Multitude of thoſe *Ant* Hills, and the Millions of the Creatures to be ſeen in them, they will ceaſe to wonder.

Again, if we conſider that as it is obſerv'd in this Letter, that when once they are fallen they never attempt to riſe and flye again; 'tis very probable, they have flown as far and as faſt as they are able, and Nature having given them Wings but juſt for the occaſion, their Deſtruction is inevitable, for firſt they have flown to the utmoſt of their ſtrength, and cannot overtake their Fellows; And ſecondly, being ſcatter'd from their Army, they have no Diſcipline, they can betake themſelves to no regular way of Livelyhood, and ſo creeping up and down, deſolate and alone, they die of meer Want and Hunger.

I have indeed ſometimes thought, that Nature has ſeem'd in good Providence, and a kind of Husbandry to the World, to give theſe Creatures Wings, juſt as if it were to put them in a Condition to quit the Country, and make room for the next Generation; juſt as if it ſhould ſpeak to them and ſay, *Come*, you have lived your Seaſon in the World, there's Wings for you, go flye away into the Sea, and drown your ſelves, for the World cannot provide room for you and all your Progeny.

No Man I hope will be ſo prophane to ſay or think, that by this Alluſion I leſſen the Power of Omnipotence, as if, *as one wickedly expreſſes it*, he had made more Creatures than he could maintain — But as there are ſeveral Creatures, who fulfill the Circulation of Life by the courſe of Nature in a Year, ſo infinite Wiſdom orders them to take as direct ways for their Exit, as they do for their Proviſion while here: Thus the Silkworm in particular when it has ſpun its Delicate Web, has Wings beſtowed upon it to flye, and is no more heard of; nor at all uſeful, and thouſands of little Worms and Inſects go the ſame way.

If any Man will ask me, how I know that theſe were *Ants* which thus fell on the City of *London*; I anſwer, I cannot ſay they were *Ants* at this diſtance, but I believe by the Deſcription, they were; but if not, other ſorts of Inſects or Flyes may take the ſame courſe, and the Conſequence would be the ſame.

Again, 'tis to be Remarked, that the time of theſe Inſects Generating, correſponds exactly; for the Month of *July* is the Seaſon, when thoſe kinds of Creatures having brought their young up to perfection, muſt either thruſt them out of their Habitations for want of room, *as the Bee*, or leave them in their Habitations, and ſeek more room for themſelves, *as the Ant*.

And

And thus I hope I have given a Rational Account of the ſhower of Flyes; if any one can give a better, it ſhall by no means be unpleaſant to me to ſee it, but on the contrary it ſhall be very obliging; and particularly I'll be very much Debtor to any body, who has been curious enough to obſerve the Bodies of theſe Flyes, that will beſtow an Account of thoſe Obſervations, being fully perſwaded they were nothing but *Ants* with Wings— And to aſſiſt any body to recollect themſelves, they may note (1.) the *Ant* when flying is ſomething larger than uſual, by which I ſuppoſe them to be the old ones, not the young Fry. (2.) Their ſhape is ſomething alter'd, and the Back riſing in a round Globular Form. (3.) The Wings are of a pale whitiſh Colour, a little longer than broad.

And ſo much for Flyes; a little touch more at Alluſions, Gentlemen, and we will have done—Methinks theſe ſhowers of Inſects have a great many good Leſſons to tell us—The Inſect World has Wonders in it paſt Humane Underſtanding—And we may ſend more People to the *Ant* than the *Sluggard*.

1. Here we may ſee the true courſe of Natural Circulation, one Generation paſſeth away and another comes; we thruſt our Parents out, and our Children ſerve us in the ſame manner; the World is a Stage of Life, where we come up in our turn, act our Part, and move off to let the ſame Follies be acted over again by our Poſterity—The Multitude that paſſes, neither ſee, nor are ſeen, and thouſands all their Lives to ſo little purpoſe, that 'tis not worth while to leave Word they have been.

2. The Subſerviency of the Creatures one towards another, is one of the Great, and perhaps one of the greateſt Beauties of the Creation; the Earth breeds and feeds innumerable Creatures, that are of no other known Signification, than again to feed other Creatures; the Worms feed the Fowls, the Flyes the Fiſh, the ſmall Birds the large, the ſmall Fiſhes the Great, and all together, Nouriſh, Feed, Cloath, divert or ſerve the Worlds great Tyrant, MAN.

3. The Seaſons of the Creatures is an admirable Teſtimony of Infinite Power, directing the whole World; the *Ants* have all Wings, and are bid flye together, they do at the ſame time, in the ſame manner, and come all together, yet know not why, how, when, or whither; in the Sea, the Mackarell come in one Month, the Herring in another, the Sprats in another; the Salmon in another; they keep Time and Place, and Method, as exactly as the Armies of the greateſt Princes March, by the Direction, and at the Command of their Officers.

Upon the whole, there are wonders indeed in every part of the Creation, and in the ſmalleſt Creatures moſt— But as to the flight of Inſects in vaſt numbers, their falling down in the ſtreets like a ſhower, and what we *call Weekly* Raining of Flyes, there is nothing wonderfull at all.

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Theſe are to give Notice.

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††† *She lives at the Golden-Ball in Hand-Court, over againſt great Turnſtile in Holborn.*